



"I will pour out my Spirit upon all...

and your young shall see visions

and your old shall dream dreams."

--Acts 2:17

Voices & Visions

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"For Such a Time as This": General Synod 22

by Timothy C. Downs

The theme of General Synod 22, held in Providence, Rhode Island, July 1-6, was, "For Such A Time As This" (Esther 4:14). What a time it was for those of us from the Southeast Conference who attended this pivotal General Synod!

It was at this gathering that we elected the officers who will lead us into the newly restructured United Church of Christ. The gathering was marked by exuberance and joy, and by anxiety and consternation, as we charted our course into a newly organized church that will require of us new understandings, new vocabularies, and new covenants. Of the five people who were elected to be our officers, three are familiar to the Southeast Conference and have been in our midst in recent years.

John Thomas, who was elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, facilitated our clergy retreat in Lanett, Alabama, last October. In his nomination address at General Synod, John began his reflections with words of the apostle Paul: "When I came to you I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God in lofty words of wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:1-2). John reflected that "year after year in the local churches of my ministry, amid weakness, frailty, pain, grief, and struggle, knowing Christ and him crucified has borne to me and to others the gift of God's wisdom, the assurance of God's power."

Jose Malayang, who was elected Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries, was welcomed by the Southeast Conference as the keynoter at our Annual Meeting in Huntsville in June. In his nomination address, through the retelling of his family's involvement with the church, Joe demonstrated his deep commitment to, and love for, the United Church of Christ. He anticipates putting into place a structure to strengthen and renew the local congregations of our denomination.

Bernice Powell Jackson was elected Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries. Two years ago Bernice gave the keynote at the Alabama/Tennessee Association Annual Meeting. In her nominating speech, Bernice reiterated her abiding faith in, and love for, the United Church of Christ and its commitment to social justice.

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"The United Church of Christ will not journey faithfully into the 21st century merely because we pass the right resolutions, craft the right structures, profess the right theologies, and elect the right leaders. No, we will journey into God's future with grace because in our local churches, in our global and ecumenical partnerships, in our institutions of compassionate care, in our witness for justice, in our full and enthusiastic embrace of the diversity of gifts and the varied struggles of all of God's people, in the dying and rising of our baptismal identity, and in the body and blood of our sacramental meal, we will give and receive the cross as priests to one another and to the world, and in that risky, vulnerable exchange encounter Christ and him crucified."

--John Thomas, General Minister & President, UCC



Chrystal Cook, Amy Cantrell, Marta Morrison, and Tim Morrison of Pilgrimage UCC proudly hold their Just Peace Award.



Essie Holman (right) is recognized as an Honored Laywoman.



Elizabeth Clement and Joyce Hollyday at the Rekindle the Gift display.

Edith Guffey, currently serving as Secretary of the United Church of Christ, was elected Associate General Minister. Dale Bishop, a widely respected scholar on the Middle

East who has served as Area Executive for the Middle East for both the United Church of Christ and the National Council of Churches, was elected Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries.

General Synod is, at its best, a multifaceted and energetic gathering of the United Church of Christ family. Early each morning, our delegates, staff, and some visitors from the Southeast Conference gathered with invited resource people. We started each day this way in order to gain a deeper sense of what was happening at General Synod, as well as to have a time of prayer and reflection together as we sought to be faithful to the tasks that lay before us.

John Thomas joined our breakfast caucus on the morning of his election. Bob Whitham, Coordinator for Structural Transition, guided us through the intricacies of the restructuring, and Stan Hastey, Executive Director of the Alliance of Baptists, interpreted the importance of the ongoing conversations between the Alliance and the United Church of Christ. Representatives of PAAM (Pacific Islanders' and Asian American Ministries), came to advocate for the resolution to provide a more just redress and apology from the United States government to the citizens of the Marshall Islands, who have for decades been exposed to radiation from atomic testing.

Joyce Hollyday and Elizabeth Clement designed a display to introduce participants at General Synod to our Rekindle the Gift project. The area around the display became a gathering place not only for our delegation, but also for those who were curious about, and excited by, the prospects that lie before us through Rekindle the Gift. Many relationships were renewed and others formed around the vision of renewing the ministries of our AMA Black Congregationalist congregations.

There were several resolutions of particular interest to the Southeast Conference. Our delegates were involved in the hearing concerning the dialogue between the Alliance of Baptists and the United Church of Christ, and greeted the overwhelmingly positive affirmation of that conversation with joy and eager anticipation. We were also present at committee hearings and vocal on the floor in support of the resolution on licensed and ordained ministries. This resolution encourages the UCC to explore providing multiple paths leading to ordination, as well as to take other steps to strengthen preparation for ministry in the local church. Our delegation felt strongly that this resolution provides the hope of training ministers to serve more faithfully and effectively in some of our smaller and more isolated congregations. Our

delegation had a strong interest in the resolution concerning opening our hearts to persons with mental illnesses, and we particularly advocated for the inclusion of addictive illnesses in that resolution.

We were honored that one of our own congregations—Pilgrimage United Church of Christ in Marietta, Georgia—received the Just Peace Award, the national award given every General Synod by the Office for Church in Society. The Coordinating Center for Women recognized Essie Holman, Virada Brand, and Harvette Barr as our Conference's Honored Laywomen.

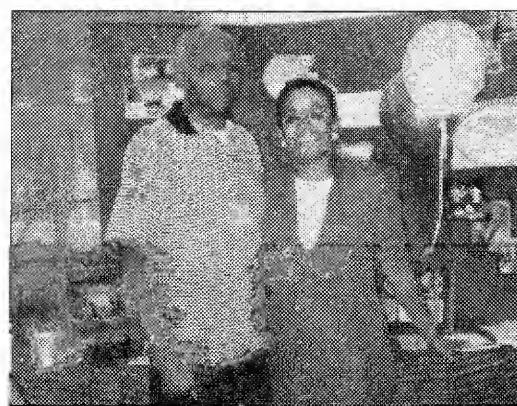
The Southeast Conference was represented in a way disproportionate to our small numbers by our gifted delegates, staff, and more visitors than can be named here. Annie Neal served as a parliamentarian. Holly Nelson and Rodney Franklin served on Search Committees for our new officers. Cynthia Tucker delivered the first Valerie Russell Memorial Lecture for Christians for Justice Action, and Joyce Myers-Brown addressed the Coordinating Center for Women's luncheon honoring women in ministry. Ted Braun was omnipresent as an editor of "Balaam's Courier," an independent newsletter serving General Synod.

Marvin Mangham represented the Stewardship Council, and Dave Menchhoffer served as a Floor Steward. Terry Ogawa helped with youth and young adult activities. Elizabeth Clement sang a solo at the United Black Christians dinner. Joe Ingle was an advocate for the resolution opposing the death penalty.

Bennie Liggins of Community Congregational Church, Montgomery, and Kathi Martin of GSN Ministries of Atlanta were present to represent our new church start efforts. Milton Hurst was an exuberant and tireless representative at the Rekindle the Gift display.

Throughout the General Synod, we were touched by the eloquence of a variety of speakers. Jonathan Kozol reminded us that our children are our future. Mi Jin Chung spoke as a young person of the importance of faith. Michael Kinnamon, who called us to be passionate about the gift of unity, led us to proclaim that this is a great time to be the church. Drums invited us to worship, and hymns and liturgical dance inspired us throughout the six days.

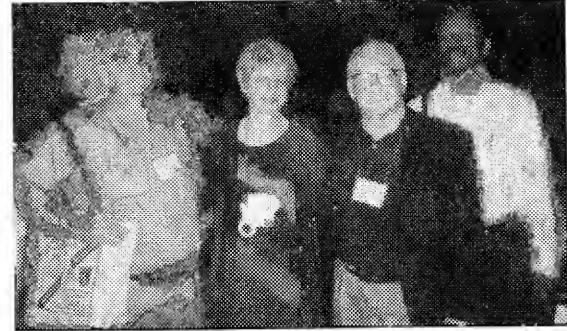
This General Synod marked the beginning of a time of healing, of drawing together and new resolve. The 740 delegates, and about 3,000 visitors, have now returned to their local churches to share a word of hope and joy, and to thank God for this gathering in "Such a Time as This" that marks the unfolding of new possibilities before us in the United Church of Christ.



Milton Hurst and Elizabeth Clement greet visitors to the Rekindle the Gift display.

Reflections from Our Delegates

Our General Synod delegates..



General Synod was a wonderful experience! Even though I had attended Synod two years ago and had some idea of what to expect, it was still an overwhelming and uplifting time. Several impressions will stay with me, but I will share two.

First, there is the tremendous diversity of the UCC and the respect with which that diversity is treated. When resolutions were presented before the plenary sessions, there were often lively exchanges about amendments and the resolutions themselves. People in the UCC are rarely luke-warm about anything! Out of respect for those in the minority on any issue, however, there is the norm of not applauding after votes are taken. The commitment to respectful unity is even stronger than all those opinions!

The second thing that will always stay with me is the Southeast Conference breakfast caucus when John Thomas, now President and General Minister-elect of the UCC, came to meet with our delegation. This occurred on the morning before the election of officers was to take place, and there was widespread concern that the process could take an unexpected turn regarding John's election. Nevertheless, he chose to meet with us, a Conference with the smallest possible number of voting delegates. He came to listen to us, not to apply any pressure. At the end of the meal, we and he had experienced God's presence in our sharing of the meal.

I am very grateful to the Southeast Conference for allowing me to be a delegate to General Synod. My life has been enriched by the experience, and I look forward to opportunities for sharing it with individuals and groups throughout the Conference.

--Dorothy Gager

So often we are products of our environment. Often we are on the road to Emmaus but we do not recognize whom we are walking alongside. To some, we might appear to be the UCC Church of Concerns and Coalitions. To some, we may have encountered pain when unity and freedom appear to be headed on a collision course. To some, we may be embarking on a period of distrust, suspicion, and uncertainty. Yet I can hear the voice of Augustine speaking to us through the annals of time saying, "Our hearts will find no rest, until we rest in Thee." Therefore, for such a time as this, let us celebrate what happened at General Synod 22 with a spirit of unity and a steadfast hope despite our differences. Let us walk on dry land together, because Canaan could be closer than we have envisioned.

--Gary L. Myers

Southeast Conference General Synod visitors enjoy fellowship with one another.



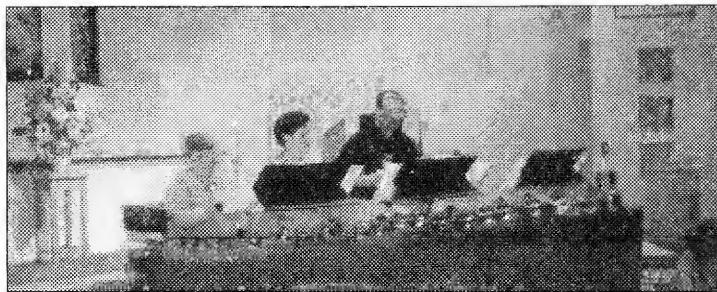
"Revive Us Again": Annual Meeting, 1999

by Joyce Hollyday

There was, as the hymn says, a "sweet, sweet spirit" in that place. On June 11, people from all corners of the Southeast Conference streamed to United Church in Huntsville, Alabama, and the big white tent set up beside it for this year's Annual Meeting. Immediately, the Spirit of God enveloped us in joy and expectation.

Throughout the weekend, we were graced by the presence of national United Church of Christ staff from the Division of Evangelism and Local Church Development. From Steve Gifford's warm welcome to Joe Malayang's keynote, from Nancy Elsenheimer's workshop to Melbalenia Evans' stirring sermon, we were revived in our commitments to grow in faith and in our connections to one another.

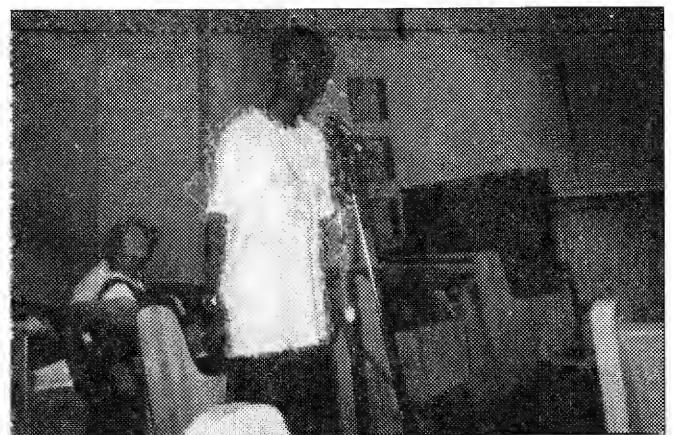
During the Business Session, we passed resolutions opposing school vouchers and supporting public schools; establishing a closer relationship with Cuba; and banning and removing land mines worldwide. We also heard about several projects of the Southeast Conference, including new church starts, Rekindle the Gift, TAP (Theology Among the People), and the Allen Retreat Center. When not in session, people wandered out to the display area in the fellowship hall; many found their way to the popcorn maker and rocking chairs in the corner to sit a spell and learn about the Covenant for Renewal. We are clearly a concerned and revitalized Conference on the move!



Ruth Shockley, Nancy Carter, and Tom Zimmerman play the hand bells.

Saturday evening brought two moving events. In our Service of Celebration and Remembrance, we recognized pastors marking ordination anniversaries, including Revs. Ralph Galt and Jack Yates for 50 years of service in the ministry. The mood turned somber as we named and lit a candle for each of the members of our Southeast Conference family who have died since our last Annual Meeting.

Then a "joyful noise" burst forth as hand bells and piano were rolled out for "Southeast Conference Alive with Music!" A male quartet and a female choir, a hand bell trio, a soloist, and a storyteller had us alternately weeping, shouting, and clapping in praise. We left the sanctuary alive in the Spirit and headed to the big tent for an Ice Cream Social.



Lawrence Simpson speaks out for the youth.

Our youth enjoyed a similar balance of faith and fun. They held workshops and had a "Chat with Melbalenia Evans." They spoke eloquently during a Speak-Out session about the need for our culture to deal with such issues as violence and self-esteem. And they played games and went laser bowling.

We all gathered together once more for our closing worship on Sunday morning. Bathed by the colorful light dancing through United Church's elegant stained glass window, by the beautiful music of the massed choir, by the Spirit alive in Word and prayer, we felt the closeness of our bond in Jesus Christ. And as we streamed out for our last lunch under the big tent, we could certainly affirm the words of the hymn "There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit in this Place":

*...Without a doubt we'll know
That we have been revived
When we shall leave this place.*



Meals are enjoyed, and friendships are renewed, under the Big Tent.

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

A U G U S T

7 Crisis Response Team Meeting
(Location To Be Announced, Chattanooga, TN)

11 Annual Meeting Planning Committee Meeting
(Circular Congregational Church, Charleston, SC)

27 Covenant for Renewal Team Meeting
(First Congregational Church, Birmingham, AL)

S E P T E M B E R

10 - 11 Georgia/South Carolina Annual Meeting
(First Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA)

17 - 18 Alabama/Tennessee Annual Meeting
(Pleasant Hill Community Church,
Pleasant Hill, TN))

27 - 29 Southern Regional Conference,
(Simpsonwood Conference & Retreat Center,
Norcross, GA)

O C T O B E R

2 South Alabama Annual Meeting
(Location To Be Announced)

15 - 17 Southern Regional Women's Retreat
(Pass Christian, MS)

16 East Alabama/West Georgia Annual Meeting
(North Main Congregational Church, Roanoke, AL)

29 - 30 BOD Orientation & Program Planning Meeting
(Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA)



Joe Malayang, Irving Faust, and Naomi Faust converse at dinner.



Lewis Tait, new church start pastor, greets the Annual Meeting.



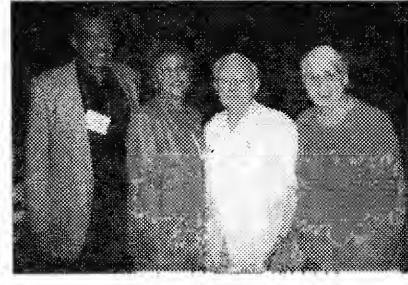
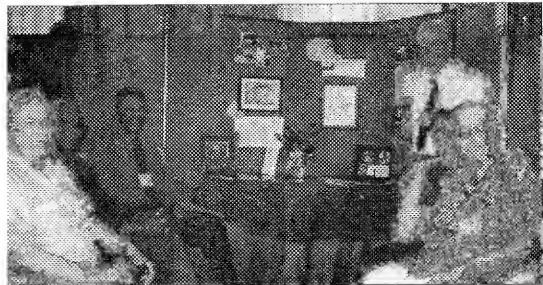
Ed Schneider and Mitchell Clement under the Big Tent.



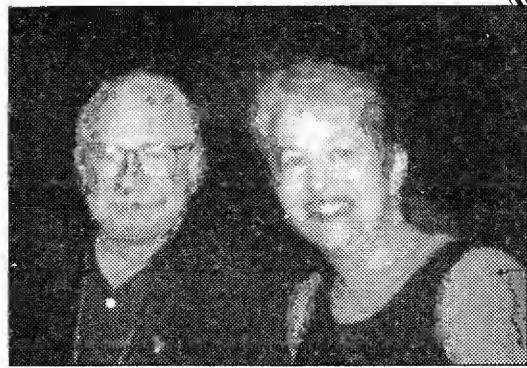
Roger Robbennolt and Patricia Robbennolt share a meal and a smile.



The choir of First Immanuel Church lifts our spirits during "Southeast Conference Alive with Music!"



Inside -
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Annual Meeting
and General Synod
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